

CITY COUNCIL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MINUTES

November 13, 2013

The City Council Oversight Committee of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met at 5:31 p.m. in the City Council Conference Room on the 13th day of November, 2013, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted in the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT: Councilmember Holman, Kovach, and Chairman Miller

ABSENT: Councilmember Jungman

OTHERS PRESENT: Councilmember Robert Castleberry, Ward Three
Mr. Jud Foster, Director of Parks and Recreation
Ms. Joy Hampton, The Norman Transcript
Mr. Steve Lewis, City Manager
Ms. Karla Chapman, Administrative Assistant III

Item 1, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING GOLF PRO SERVICES FOR WESTWOOD GOLF COURSE.

Mr. Jud Foster, Director of Parks and Recreation, said Mr. David Lisle, Westwood Golf Pro, submitted a 90 day notice of separation effective January 14, 2014. He said Staff sees this as an opportunity to re-evaluate different management options and how to move forward. He said in 2008, the Finance Committee discussed golf course management options that included getting out of the golf business; leasing to a commercial management company; changing the golf course manager position to a salaried employee position; or hiring a Professional Golf Academy (PGA) manager. The Finance Committee believed hiring a PGA Professional manager would be the best fit for Westwood.

Mr. Foster said once it was decided a PGA manager option would be best, Staff developed a performance based management approach where emphasis was placed on marketing, programming, and annual goals. He said the golf course's financial position is not where the City wants it to be, but it is improving and trending in the right direction and progress is tracked on a daily basis. Councilmember Kovach asked how much money the golf course is losing and Mr. Foster said \$60,000 in FYE 2013. Chairman Miller asked if this trend is decreasing every year and Mr. Foster said yes, in FYE 2012 the loss was \$80,000 and in FYE 2011 it was \$100,000. Mr. Foster said year to date for 2014, the golf course is \$14,500 in the black. He said Norman is following Oklahoma City's (OKC) lead and purposely charges \$.50 less. He said after Westwood's renovation in 2003, Westwood's fees were higher than OKC metro golf courses.

Mr. Foster said the current golf pro contract stipulates the golf pro will maintain, manage, and operate the facilities (not including maintenance of the grounds), provide lessons, and rent and sell golf supplies and equipment. The golf pro is given a \$42,000 fixed annual income, City health benefits, and 100% of the revenue from lockers, club storage and repair, rented pull carts and clubs, and pro shop merchandise (all supplied by the golf pro). Chairman Miller asked how much additional revenue do the other items provide and Mr. Foster said approximately \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually. Chairman Miller asked if the golf pro has to provide those financial records to the City and Mr. Foster said financial information is provided to the City Manager twice a year.

Item 1, continued:

Mr. Foster said Staff compared the City's golf pro salary average with the South Central section of Oklahoma (Norman's comparable district area) and Norman's annual salary is \$8,000 below the average, but the total package that includes revenue from the pro shop increases it to \$3,000 above the average.

Mr. Foster said Staff feels comfortable with the language of the contract and felt Westwood is a good golf course that will be sought after by other professionals. He said there is a no cost employee consulting service available to the City as a PGA member and felt this is the best way to reach out to potential candidates.

Chairman Miller requested the timeline from advertising to hiring and Mr. Foster said approximately twelve weeks. Chairman Miller asked if any further information will be presented to the Finance Committee and Mr. Foster did not believe anything needed to go to the Finance Committee. Chairman Miller said she asked because the Finance Committee had discussed the golf pro position in 2008 and Mr. Foster said at that time the Finance Committee reviewed a very detailed financial study of Westwood's operation, e.g. how much money was being lost, why, and how to fix it so he did not believe they needed to review the information again.

Councilmember Kovach wanted a brief discussion on the Finance Committee's option to hire one of the two assistant golf pros. He said one of them could be made manager to see how well they do on a temporary basis before looking into hiring a new professional manager. Chairman Miller said she did not understand what positions are actually City employees at Westwood and Mr. Foster said the head golf pro is a contracted employee and the two assistant golf pros are City employees, Mr. Bobby Florer and Mr. Rick Parish with Mr. Florer being the senior employee. He said there are two permanent part-time golf pro shop employees and a number of seasonal part-time employees. He said Mr. Parish is a PGA, Class A Professional, which is the minimum qualification the City would require for the golf pro position and Mr. Florer is not a PGA professional.

Mr. Foster said the idea of a trial temporary full-time employee was discussed, but one of the hurdles is that Mr. Lisle owns all of the golf pro shop merchandise and wants to transition that to the next manager so someone would need to purchase that merchandise from him. He said if the City chose to hire the golf pro manager as a full-time City employee the City would need to purchase the merchandise. Mr. Foster said keeping merchandise on the shelves makes for a better transition for customers. Councilmember Kovach said if Mr. Lisle is terminating his contract with the City, is the City obligated to buy his merchandise and Mr. Foster said the City is not obligated to purchase it and yes, a new manager could purchase it. Mr. Foster said Mr. Florer has the most experience and instead of placing him in the position on a trial basis, he would suggest hiring Mr. Florer on a short term contract agreement and if it did not work out the agreement could be terminated. He said if the City initiates that, the City will be required to purchase the merchandise, but if Mr. Florer initiates that agreement, he would have to purchase the merchandise. Councilmember Kovach asked the value of the merchandise and if it is something worth buying and Mr. Foster said the value is between \$60,000 and \$70,000 and it is good merchandise, but there is a lot of it. He said Mr. Lisle is trying to sell as much as possible to reduce the inventory and is not ordering any new product. Mr. Foster said the City would prefer not to take ownership of the merchandise.

Mr. Foster thought it would be a good idea to see who might be interested in the position and what they might bring to the table. He said the City is looking for someone that will bring fresh marketing and programming ideas, expertise, experience, etc., to the program.

Item 1, continued:

Councilmember Kovach said the idea of placing a contracted employee on the City's healthcare plan bothers him and he understands this is something the City has been doing for 27 years, but as the City moves into hiring a new person he would prefer to increase the salary so the new person can purchase their own insurance or buy into the City's plan. Mr. Foster said offering health insurance is very common in contracts with PGA professionals and makes the position competitive. Councilmember Castleberry said that may be true, but the healthcare landscape is changing. Mr. Steve Lewis, City Manager, said although the healthcare landscape is changing, the golf pros that apply for the job will expect healthcare as part of the overall package. He felt not offering healthcare would have a negative impact on recruitment. Mr. Foster said applicants will most likely be a salaried assistant working at another golf course with healthcare and to give that up would be difficult.

Councilmember Kovach suggested moving Mr. Parish into the position and hiring someone with a lesser salary into the assistant position. Mr. Foster said Staff discussed that in detail and his opinion and recommendation would be that if Mr. Parish is promoted to the golf pro position, he be replaced with a PGA pro. He said Mr. Lisle and Mr. Parish provide a lot of golf lessons and Mr. Parish would become the only PGA providing lessons and, as head golf pro, he would not be able to do it all. He said golf lessons are a service many customers want and expect. He said assistant golf pros have specific PGA training and Westwood needs that. Councilmember Castleberry said that could hurt the Junior Golf Program because that is where most of the lessons are provided. Mr. Foster said Mr. Lisle have worked very hard to establish a large Junior Program with help from several volunteer PGA pros and it is important to keep that going.

Chairman Miller asked about Westwood's debt and Mr. Foster said the City is ten years into a 20 year debt program paying \$200,000 per year. Councilmember Kovach asked if that could be refinanced with a lower bond rate and Mr. Lewis said Mr. Anthony Francisco, Finance Director, looked at refinancing, but felt it would not be worth doing.

Chairman Miller said it would be great to hire someone already working for the City because the City would know their track record, but felt the most important part of any golf course is the person running it. She said this is an opportunity to at least look at other people and felt it would be nice to get an energetic person in that position with new ideas for the program. She strongly favors looking outside of the City for the position.

Chairman Miller asked about the search committee and whether or not a representative or golf pro from another golf course could be on the search committee and Mr. Foster said the search committee will consist of himself, the Parks and Recreation Department Superintendent, one representative from the Norman Parks Board, two PGA representatives, and one Westwood Men's Golf Association representative. Mr. Foster said he knows the two PGA representatives quite well and trusts their judgment.

Councilmember Kovach asked if the starting salary will be \$42,000 or lower and Mr. Foster said his suggestion is to start at \$42,000, which is comparably low and once the new person has accomplished some goals, the salary could be increased. Mr. Lewis agreed and said the salary is on the low side, but there is opportunity to make that up in merchandise and rental sales. Chairman Miller asked about the term of the contract and if there is a probationary period and Mr. Foster said the contract is typically two to three years. He thought it would be hard to find someone that will sign a one year contract when they are purchasing \$60,000 in merchandise. Mr. Foster said if the City is not satisfied the person is meeting the provisions in the contract the contract can be terminated.

Item 1, continued:

Councilmember Kovach asked what qualities the City is looking for the most in a golf pro to help turn things around. Mr. Foster said the golf pro will be the face of the facility, needs to be out in the community, and focused on marketing. The person will need to be personable, well liked, provide lessons, offer free clinics, promote the game, etc. He would like to have someone that will make appearances at the Lions Club, Rotary Club, and schools, basically someone that gets out into the community more. Councilmember Kovach said everyone has strengths and weaknesses and the person hired needs to run the program not the Parks Director or City Manager. Councilmember Castleberry said OU hired a master chef to run their restaurant and that brought people into the facility for lunch, even non-golfers. He said it gave the golf course a country club atmosphere and while people are there for lunch they browse the pro shop. He said getting people to come to the facility is the key. Mr. Lewis said the facility needs to be seen as a family destination place and needs a golf pro that has the marketing ability to bring in sponsors or private donors to help build amenities to beautify and improve Westwood.

Chairman Miller asked how responsive the City has been keeping the golf course the best it can be and how that will impact golf pro's decision to locate there. She asked if there is anything the City can do to improve the golf course since she hears so much about how gorgeous and well-kept OU's golf course is. Mr. Lewis said Westwood's clubhouse and locker rooms need major improvements so part of the golf pro's position will be mobilizing community support, and getting donations and sponsorships. He said the golf course is a short easy course and caters to a different market. Mr. Foster said Westwood's course is in good shape. He said the City is intentionally in the market it is in because they want to be able to attract beginner, junior, and senior players, but still be able to hold tournaments for accomplished players. He said Westwood's Fourth of July tournament is the largest stroke played tournament in the State. He said a short golf course also allows for a competitive fee structure. Councilmember Castleberry agreed that Westwood needed to stay in the market it is in because it is important to junior and senior players. He said seniors do not want a very challenging course they just want to play golf and socialize. Mr. Foster said PGA of America is pushing a nationwide mantra of, "Play golf for fun and do not worry about shooting the highest score."

Mr. Lewis said Westwood is trying to expand on tournaments whether they are for the United Way or businesses holding a tournament between employees. He said Westwood's course is very forgiving to those players that may only play two to three times a year. Councilmember Castleberry agreed and said Westwood needs a golf pro that understands its market.

Chairman Miller said she is concerned about the condition and upkeep of Westwood overall including the tennis courts and swimming pool. She wants Norman to be able to offer quality programs for the entire community.

Councilmember Castleberry felt that Mr. Parish should have an opportunity to apply and Mr. Foster said he expects that to happen. Mr. Lewis said Staff's philosophy is they owe it to the course, they owe it to the customer, and they owe it to the City to try to secure the best golf pro possible. He said that includes issues currently confronting the course as well as issues over the next five years and trying to hire the pro that can meet those needs. He said if an internal person applies and gets the job, that person can stand tall because they went through the same process as every other applicant.

Chairman Miller and Committee members felt Staff is heading in the right direction.

Item 1, continued:

Items submitted for the record

1. Memorandum dated November 6, 2013, from Jud Foster, Director of Parks and Recreation, to Steve Lewis, City Manager
2. Westwood Park Golf Professional Position Summary
3. Contract No. K-1314-35
4. PGA Employment Center Careerlinks Job Notification
5. FYE 2014 City of Norman Budget Division Summary - Westwood Golf Course
6. FYE 2014 City of Norman Budget Division Service Efforts and Accomplishments – Westwood Golf Course

Item 2, being:

MISCELLANEOUS DISCUSSION.

Chairman Miller said she received three different concerns about abandoned houses in a one week period. She remembers a nuisance property on Cruce Street when she was newly elected and what a horrible problem it was for that neighborhood. She spoke with Ms. Linda Price, Revitalization Manager, and learned there are several abandoned or vacant properties all over town. Chairman Miller did not know how much tighter Norman's regulations need to be in order for the City to act on these properties more. She said the Police Chief wants to have zero crime, but crime can be exacerbated by abandoned properties. She would like to discuss this issue at a future meeting and see what other communities are doing and asked if other Committee members would like to do so.

Councilmember Kovach said the house on Cruce Street was a unique circumstance due to the high volume of police calls regarding the property. He did not believe the houses Chairman Miller is concerned about would rise to the threshold of a nuisance property. He said one way to get owners attention is to get into their pockets by raising fines especially if properties receive a high number of calls to police or Code Enforcement. Mr. Lewis said some homes are in such disrepair they need to be razed and those are considered dangerous buildings so the City can pursue those more stringently; however, it involves a long legal process.

Chairman Miller asked if the City has a list of abandoned property and Councilmember Kovach said Ms. Price has a list that includes status of the property's ownership, i.e. bankruptcy, transfer of owner, etc. He said the City needs to tread lightly when it comes to vacant properties especially if the owner is maintaining the property. Chairman Miller agreed and said as long as the property is being maintained there should be no issues.

Councilmember Castleberry did not feel it was any of the City's business who lives in a house. He does not like the City's ordinance that allows no more than three unrelated people to live in a house and he would like to revisit that ordinance. He said the City has a "party house" ordinance that takes care of the problems associated with more than three unrelated people sharing a house.

Ms. Joy Hampton, The Norman Transcript, disagreed with Councilmember Castleberry and said three unrelated people living in a residentially zoned home will probably each have a car and they may each have a girlfriend or boyfriend that has a car and it is a problem for the neighborhood when more than three unrelated people share a house. She wondered if it was appropriate to talk about something that is not on the agenda even if there is no quorum and Chairman Miller said her discussion is on whether or not the Committee wants to study abandoned or vacant properties in a future meeting.

Ms. Hampton said she has seen vacant properties that are well maintained and she has seen vacant properties that are constantly un-kept and the neighbors have to keep calling in complaints week after week. She asked if there is a limit to how many times a person has to call in a complaint before the City acts on the complaint. Chairman Miller said that is part of the issues she wants to discuss. She said Code Enforcement Officers do a good job and continue to take action, but there is a limit to the action they can take. Ms. Hampton asked if there were penalties imposed on properties with continual complaints and Mr. Lewis said if it goes to Court, the Judge can determine the range of violations and fine the property owner based on that. Chairman Miller said sometimes the City has to remedy the problem and will put a lien on the property and that lien has to be paid by the property owner. Ms. Hampton asked if neighbors have to continually call week after week to get a yard mowed or is there a limit on the number of times they call before the City takes action or if there are penalties to the property owner for that. Mr. Lewis said the penalty to the property owner is they have to pay an enormous amount of money to have their yard mowed by a City contractor. Ms. Hampton said she is asking more about the property owner that mows their property, but only after multiple complaints have been called in and they have been given notice by the City. Mr. Lewis said there will always be people who play that system and there is really no way to stop that from happening, but there is no type of limit. Councilmember Kovach said those same rules protect property owners who may have gone out of town for a lengthy amount of time and hired someone to mow their yard and that did not happen.

Mr. Lewis said the conversation seems to be going into a direction of discussion on the issue rather than discussion on whether or not to talk about the issue at a future meeting. He asked the Committee to give him some feedback on whether or not they wanted to discuss the item on a future agenda and the Committee agreed they would.

Councilmember Holman said an item he would like to discuss at a future meeting is oil well site security. He said there is an active well site in the Monterey Addition that is not secured and there is some ongoing dispute as to who is responsible for the site. He would like to review the City's policy on well site safety. Mr. Lewis said in 2008 or 2009 a young boy climbed over a fence at a well site in Oklahoma City and was injured and the City of Norman compared their ordinance to surrounding communities at that time and they were fairly similar. He said if the Committee wants to revisit that they can certainly do so.

Chairman Miller suggested holding an informational session with Council regarding abandoned houses and oil well sites that includes input from the Police Chief and Legal Department. Mr. Lewis asked if the Committee wanted to review both items in their December meeting and Chairman Miller said yes, if possible. Councilmember Castleberry suggested Staff submit information to the entire Council and if that information is enough to answer questions raised tonight, there would be no need to discuss the items at the committee level and Chairman Miller felt that was fair.

ADJOURNMENT.

The meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.